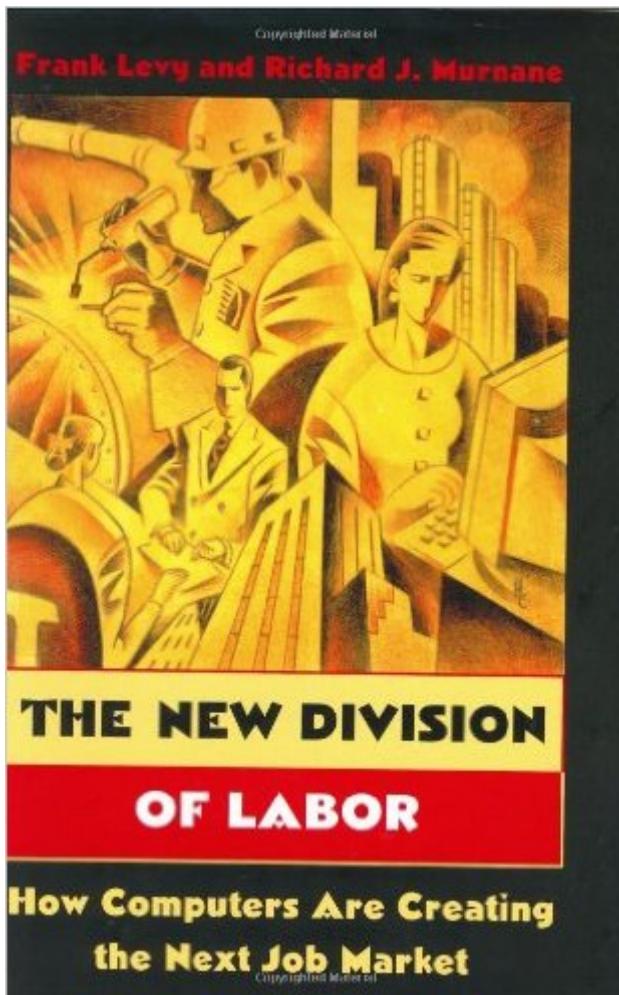


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The New Division Of Labor: How Computers Are Creating The Next Job Market



Synopsis

As the current recession ends, many workers will not be returning to the jobs they once held--those jobs are gone. In *The New Division of Labor*, Frank Levy and Richard Murnane show how computers are changing the employment landscape and how the right kinds of education can ease the transition to the new job market. The book tells stories of people at work--a high-end financial advisor, a customer service representative, a pair of successful chefs, a cardiologist, an automotive mechanic, the author Victor Hugo, floor traders in a London financial exchange. The authors merge these stories with insights from cognitive science, computer science, and economics to show how computers are enhancing productivity in many jobs even as they eliminate other jobs--both directly and by sending work offshore. At greatest risk are jobs that can be expressed in programmable rules--blue collar, clerical, and similar work that requires moderate skills and used to pay middle-class wages. The loss of these jobs leaves a growing division between those who can and cannot earn a good living in the computerized economy. Left unchecked, the division threatens the nation's democratic institutions. The nation's challenge is to recognize this division and to prepare the population for the high-wage/high-skilled jobs that are rapidly growing in number--jobs involving extensive problem solving and interpersonal communication. Using detailed examples--a second grade classroom, an IBM managerial training program, Cisco Networking Academies--the authors describe how these skills can be taught and how our adjustment to the computerized workplace can begin in earnest.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a very short and easy to read book. Yet, it is very informative and insightful. I have read many books covering the same theme written by Peter Drucker, John Naisbitt, Robert Reich, and Lester Thurow among other visionaries and economists. This one is the best on the subject for two reasons. The two authors studied the historical data much more extensively than the others. Also, this book is more focused. The authors did not get sidetracked by many related economic and political issues. The authors extensive research dispels thoroughly the notion that computerization is bad for employment. To the contrary, computerization has increased both the quantity and quality of jobs. The authors studied in detail labor trends over the past 40 years to support their conclusion. They uncovered the prescient work of Herbert Simon, who wrote an essay in the 1960s on the change in labor mix with the advent of technologies. The authors documented that for the most part Simon was correct. Due to computerization, the labor mix was going to change materially over the next several decades tilted towards a greater concentration of jobs associated with greater complexity in terms of critical thinking and judgment. Just as Simon predicted, there is today a far greater percentage of the population involved in complex jobs associated with an intense critical thinking component. Such jobs include managers, professionals, technicians, and many sales related activities. By the same token, there is a far smaller percentage of the population engaged in blue collar routine work. As mentioned, just as the quality of jobs (greater complexity) has improved immensely during the past several decades, so as the quantity.

I returned to this book after almost 10 years since it's initial publication, mainly because of the leaps in technology that have occurred since then. It is funny to see a picture of a Palm Pilot when so many people now would not have known what one was, never mind my hand held Psion machine from years earlier. My thought of this book is driven by more of a concern of something I see everyday, which is the failure of a lot of businesses to capitalize on new technology. In retail, a brief visit to an Apple store before visiting a more typical retail outlet suggests that Apple is ahead of the competition who trail significantly, but also that Apple itself, does not use it's own technology in a radical way. This book is serious and interesting and approaches it's concerns in a way which suggests that resources are being squandered and that our society is not making as much out of this dramatic rise in technology that it could be. The key thing that is not considered by the book is that people who can dream and think the unthinkable are crucial to leverage the potential of technological developments. Think of Facebook for example. There are people who could see at once that Facebook has advantages in the spread of consumer knowledge about products. In the

youth market the sharing of information about bands and other media through Facebook could have been used in a direct fashion to promote the things that people liked. instead, years later, the now huge Facebook institution is gingerly putting its toes into the retail market through enabling people to buy things.

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